

Army Ordered Massive Return Fire When Civilians Present

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Three former U.S. soldiers involved in the infamous "Collateral Murder" helicopter gunship attack on Baghdad civilians in July 2007, say that attack was nothing out of the ordinary. The massacre---that killed more than a dozen Iraqis, two of them employed by Reuters News Service---ignited a wave of international revulsion against the U.S. military when a video of the massacre was released by WikiLeaks last April.

"What the world did not see is the months of training that led up to the incident, in which soldiers were taught to respond to threats with a barrage of fire---a "wall of steel," in Army parlance--even if it put civilians at risk," report Sarah Lazare and Ryan Harvey in the August 16th issue of The Nation magazine.

Former Army Specialist Josh Stieber said that newly arrived soldiers in Baghdad were asked if they would fire back at an attacker if they knew unarmed civilians might get hurt in the process. Those who did not respond affirmatively, or who hesitated, were "knocked around" until they realized what was expected of them, added former Army Specialist Ray Corcoles, who deployed with Stieber.

A third former Army specialist, Ethan McCord, said his battalion commander gave orders to shoot indiscriminately after attacks by improvised explosive devices. "Anytime someone in your line gets hit by an IED"you kill every motherf*cker in the street," McCord quotes him as saying.

Corcoles told the reporters he purposely turned his gun away from people. "You don't even know if somebody's shooting at you. It's just insanity to just start shooting people."

"From our own experiences, and the experiences of other veterans we have talked to, we know that the acts depicted in this video

are everyday occurrences of this war: this is the nature of how U.S.-led wars are carried out in this region," say McCord and Stieber in an open letter to the Iraqis who were injured in the July attack. Together with Corcoles, they have decided to go public about the true nature of the war.

McCord was shown in the video rushing the wounded children from a van. For this humanitarian act, he was "threatened and mocked by his commanding officer," say The Nation reporters, and his platoon leader also yelled at him "to quit worrying about those 'motherfucking kids'."

McCord told the reporters of "multiple instances in which soldiers abused detainees or beat people up in their houses. In one case, he says, someone was taken from his house, beaten up and then left on the side of the road, bloodied and still handcuffed," Lazare and Harvey write.

The veterans say they support the release of the video and other documents by WikiLeaks because it confronts people globally "with the realities of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan."

Meanwhile, Army intelligence analyst Bradley Manning, accused of leaking the video to WikiLeaks, is facing Espionage Act charges and has been transferred to Kuwait for a military trial, Lazare and Harvey note. The government is also probing where WikiLeaks got the 90,000 secret U.S. military documents from Afghanistan it released late last month. These reports, according to The Nation, detailed the role of U.S. assassination teams, widespread civilian casualties resulting from U.S. attacks and staggering Afghan government incompetence and corruption."

The totalitarian mantle of secrecy by which the Pentagon shrouds its war crimes makes the disclosures by intelligence analyst Manning appear all the more courageous. As long as the Pentagon keeps him behind bars every American who believes in the Biblical injunction that "the truth shall make ye free" is also a prisoner of the same tyranny. And the three former Army specialists who told their story to The Nation have given us a

pretty good idea of what it is the Pentagon doesn't want the American people to know.

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Sherwood Ross worked as a reporter for the Chicago Daily News and contributed a regular "Workplace" column for Reuters. He has contributed to national magazines and hosted a talk show on WOL, Washington, D.C. In the Sixties he was active as public (more...)